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C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 000406

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TAGS: PREL SADC ZI BC AU

SUBJECT: DEMARCHE DELIVERED: SADC OBSERVERS FOR ZIMBABWE

REF: STATE 556159 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Katherine Canavan, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador Canavan delivered demarche regarding election observers for Zimbabwe to the SADC Executive Secretary, who agreed on the need and outlined SADC's current activities and plans. He said he has lined up pledges for between 400 and 500 SADC observers and hopes to arrange many more, and has already sent a low-profile group of retired generals from several member states into Zimbabwe to liaise with all sides on ways to defuse the violence. He was frank about the need for SADC to help Zimbabweans express "their clear desire for change." End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Canavan met with SADC Executive Secretary Dr. Tomaz Salomao on May 27, and delivered demarche points on the need for SADC election observers in Zimbabwe (reftel). Dr. Salomao was in general agreement with all U.S. views, and outlined the current status of SADC's election efforts and plans:

-- For the last several weeks a group of retired generals from South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia, and Angola have been in Zimbabwe at SADC's behest, sent to help defuse the violence surrounding the election preparations. The team of about twenty-five individuals is not there "to write reports," he said, but to actively liaise with the police, military, government, political parties, and any other key players in order to help the sides head off potential problems and violence. Salomao said he was certain that the team's low-profile confidence-building efforts were paying off, and he wants to further increase the size of the group.

-- SADC has already arranged for the deployment of about 400 observers, and expects that number to quickly reach "a minimum of five hundred." He endorsed the idea that 1,000 observers could be very well utilized, and was happy to discuss ideas for adding to the pledges he has now. He wants "senior" observers, including as many MPs as possible, and noted that most regional parliaments are now in recess. He said he is working closely with member states to obtain their actual lists of observers by name, and is pushing them to send high-level representatives such as members of parliament. Separately, he said, the African Union is also arranging to send observers from other regions of Africa, but the AU has not yet provided him details or numbers. Salomao has been given authority to draw on SADC's Reserve Fund to pay for the deployments, and said that for now that funding is adequate.

-- On May 29, a group of five SADC officials will relocate to Harare to establish SADC's election observation headquarters. The next day, Dr. Salomao will himself travel to Harare, in order to be able to personally coordinate SADC's efforts. He expects to travel back and forth in the period prior to the election, and promised to brief Ambassadors Canavan and McGee on the progress of the observer missions.

-- During the first week of July SADC observers will begin to arrive in Zimbabwe for briefings and deployment. If

additional observers become available, they will be added to the deployed personnel. Botswana has advised that its observers are ready to be deployed.

¶3. (SBU) Dr. Salomao also observed that the Zimbabwe elections are only the beginning of a series of elections that will take place in the region in the next two years. He cited South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Angola, and Mozambique among the countries that will be holding elections and may need SADC assistance. Ambassador Canavan suggested that the SADC Parliamentary Forum is an excellent resource and expressed the hope that the SADC PF can play a constructive role in the upcoming elections in all of these countries.

¶4. (C) Comment: Dr. Salomao was notably sympathetic to our views, and projected an energy and frankness that has not always marked previous discussions about Zimbabwe. For the first time, he dropped his diplomatic reserve and said quite simply that it is clear the people of Zimbabwe want a change of government, and that SADC needs to do all it can to allow them the means to express that desire in the upcoming vote. Given SADC's decidedly mixed track record on Zimbabwe, the plans he outlined are advanced, specific, and very positive. Salomao's personal commitment seemed strong. He agreed that it could be useful for him to have a conversation with Ambassador McGee once he is established in Harare, and we will provide him some contact information. Meanwhile, he will be in contact with the SADC Parliamentary Forum, which cannot itself send an official delegation of observers, but which can urge member MPs to volunteer to serve as bi-lateral or general SADC observers. He agreed that any encouragement U.S. missions could give to MPs and other prominent contacts across the continent would be useful in gathering the increased numbers of credible observers that we feel are warranted. End comment.

CANAVAN